

benefits paid during the year. Imagine further that the Social Security Administration spends about a half a percentage point of those trillion dollars to administer all of those benefits. Our dedicated Federal civil servants are the best in the world, but individual Americans still at times fall through the cracks due to their unique circumstances and are unable to get what they need. Frustration and disillusionment can follow, and this is corrosive to faith in government and ultimately to democracy itself.

Combating these feelings of disempowerment was the challenge and mission of the casework staff in my Vermont offices. They were not able to solve every problem put in front of them, but they always did their best. For 48 years, they talked with any constituent who called my office with an issue regarding a Federal agency, regardless of wealth, power, or political affiliation. They helped Vermonters resolve immigration issues, get their passports, process their Social Security Disability Insurance applications, get needed care from the Veteran's Administration. When they spotted systemic failures, they worked with my staff in Washington to write legislation in order to make things work better in the future.

My staff and I helped constituents with issues writ large and small because what seems trivial to one person can be incredibly important to another. Hearing from Vermonters every day helped me do a better job in Washington. Just as importantly, my staff always let Vermonters know that they mattered.

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, throughout my time in the Senate, I have been proud to champion policies and programs that encourage community and economic development. The two go hand-in-hand. Vibrant communities attract investment and economic success supports community life.

Our sense of community and our pride in our communities defines Vermont. As a Vermonter, I have supported programs that invest in the physical infrastructure our communities need to thrive—from water and wastewater systems, roads, bridges and sidewalks, to the clean-up of brownfields.

Burlington's Church Street Marketplace is a model nationwide for how to build a lively, attractive downtown that will attract visitors while also serving local residents. I was proud to secure funding for its creation.

But the ties and connections which create community do not come just from buildings and sidewalks. They come from a shared history and the knowledge that we have a shared future. That is one of the things I learned from my dear friend, the late Paul Bruhn, for whom the Paul Bruhn His-

toric Revitalization Program is named. The program is used across the country to not simply preserve historic buildings, but to give them new life as housing, business incubators, or community centers which preserve our history as we build our future.

Community development block grants and the HOME program are also used throughout the country to build needed housing, which we know touches on nearly every challenge we face from workforce development to substance use. That is why when the previous administration wanted to cut funding for these programs, I fought to retain that funding.

Roughly half of all Americans work for a small business, which is why I had also strongly advocated for the Small Business Administration and defended it whenever an administration decided, wrongly, that it should be cut. It is also why I pushed for funding for the Small Business Development Centers to provide free technical assistance to small businesses and help them attract capital.

In Vermont, I secured funding for the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund and the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies to provide needed capital for new businesses. I also supported innovative job training centers such as the Advanced Manufacturing Center at Vermont Technical College and the Burlington's Aviation Technical Center to be sure these new businesses have the skilled workers they need to succeed.

I have always been a proud champion and advocate for Vermont's State-run and privately run airport. For decades, the Burlington International Airport has served as Vermont's window to the world and an essential economic engine that the broader economic development community across the State depends on.

I also brought Federal funds to build and strengthen the infrastructure that connects Vermont's businesses and communities to the rest of the world such as airports, rail lines, and the ports of entry along the border we share with Quebec.

One of the reasons people come to Vermont to visit or to live is the State's physical beauty. Whether you prefer to walk through a historic village green or to ski down a mountain, Vermont offers the chance to get outside and enjoy beautiful weather.

I used Vermont's town forests as a model for the Community Forest and Open Space Program, which protects open spaces while creating places across the country for people to walk, hunt, and cycle right in their community. I sought to protect and expand Vermont's fisheries, trails, and forests because public spaces are integral to our individual and collective well-being while also supporting economic development.

When it comes to building strong communities and strong economies, there isn't a silver bullet. Instead,

there are a great many pieces, each of which varies slightly from place to place. I am proud to have helped towns and cities in Vermont and across the country and the businesses located there get what they needed from their government to improve the lives of their residents.

LAKE CHAMPLAIN

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to say a few words about why protecting and restoring Lake Champlain has been so important to me throughout my years in the U.S. Senate.

Lake Champlain, shared by Vermont, New York, and Quebec is a gem. It is one of the largest and cleanest lakes in the United States, ringed by the Adirondack Mountains on the west and the Green Mountains on the east. Marcelle and I visited Lake Champlain together before we were married and have returned there often to walk her shores, swim, and scuba dive. The lake is at the center of the culture and economy for much of Vermont.

I took office just 2 years after the 1972 passage of the Clean Water Act, and Lake Champlain was in decline. Sea lamprey were devastating the fishery of the lake, municipal waste water was barely treated before discharge, and we were just beginning to understand the problems caused by stormwater runoff. I immediately began working on funding for Lake Champlain cleanup and am proud that at least \$360 million has been directed through annual appropriations to protect the lake as the result of my efforts. My leadership of the Senate Appropriations Committee has helped in this work, with about \$50 million in FY2022 funding going for Lake Champlain.

I leave office secure in the knowledge that although I will no longer be directing Federal funds, I have been able to authorize several programs that are now well established and will continue the work to protect the waters and wildlife of Lake Champlain and support the communities which line its shores for years to come. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Lake Champlain Sea Grant Program became possible when I arranged for Champlain to be declared a Great Lake. While the declaration was brief, the Sea Grant Program is now well established, funded at more than \$1 million each year and has made a tremendous difference for a multitude of Lake Champlain programs.

I led legislation in 1991 and reauthorizing bills in 2002 and 2022 to establish and grow the EPA Lake Champlain Basin Program. The LCBP brings together Vermont, New York, Quebec, and all relevant Federal Agencies, with a budget in FY23 of \$33 million to lead the protection and restoration of Lake Champlain. And I am so proud that the FY23 omnibus includes the \$35 million reauthorization of the LCBP for the next 5 years.